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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY





A History  
of the  
**FIRST WHITE SETTLERS**  
in  
**VERSAILLES TOWNSHIP**

Brown County, Illinois



**A HISTORY OF THE**  
**FIRST WHITE SETTLERS**  
**IN VERSAILLES TOWNSHIP,**  
**BROWN COUNTY.**

Published in The Democrat-Message, Mt. Sterling, Illinois, in the summer of 1959, from clippings owned by W. R. Adams of Versailles, Illinois.

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The story contained herein is the history of the first white settlers to homestead in Brown County, Illinois. The account was written by B. F. Bond and was published for the first time in the Versailles Sentinel in 1922, 100 years following the events described.

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Mt. Sterling, Illinois

1960



**A FIRST SETTLER'S CABIN**—This picture was taken from a postcard acquired with other antiques by Miss Bertha Smith of Mt. Sterling. It is perhaps typical of the cabins of the Vandeventer-McFarland families. The picture is captioned "An Early Settler's Cabin in Brown County."



### Preface

Early in the spring of 1901, N. J. Dawson, then publishing The Graphic, a weekly newspaper in Versailles, was solicited by a number of citizens to have R. N. McFarland, the last survivor of that little band of sturdy pioneers who made the first permanent settlement in Versailles township and what is now Brown county, narrate for publication a series of reminiscences of those early days as he saw them, realizing that his knowledge of these interesting events and incidents in the lives of our first settlers should be recorded in some manner in the history of the township for the benefit of coming generations.

Mr. McFarland at that date was in his 83rd year, yet his mind and memory were as fertile as ever and nothing gave him greater pleasure than a recital of the adventures, hardships and incidents that daily went to make up the lives of this brave little band of Empire builders. Mr. Dawson entered heartily into the plan and Mr. McFarland immediately consented to give a full recital that would cover everything connected therewith that might prove of interest to the readers of that paper.

Accordingly a purse was raised to cover any expense that might occur in trips to the scenes of early historical points and in procuring data, etc. It was also agreed between Mr. McFarland and Mr. Dawson that I should accompany Mr. McFarland, write his narrative as he told it and assist in putting it in form for publication.

We spent a full day in the late spring of that year for this express purpose in the Vandeventer settlement and there Mr. McFarland pointed out to me the sites of the first cabins, early trails, Indian camps, etc.

With a recital of those early times, that to me was so vividly interesting, that at times I became so intent in his story that I would forget my part of the program and would stop writing. After our return from this trip, I spent that evening until after midnight writing his narrative just as he told it. I did the same the following night and on the third night I read my notes to Mr. McFarland and he and I made such corrections as suited him. We had several meetings following this and I had, at the last reading with him completely filled a large tab of soft paper with his recital of these events and were it all printed now would make several lengthy newspaper articles.

Following this for first one reason and then another, we neglected "our narrative." Business reasons prevented me making another trip as "Uncle Nelson" suggested and with the addition of several pages would at different times when he would spend an afternoon with me in the post office that winter, our "historical narrative lay dormant, although we frequently talked of and planned for our next trip, we never made it. The Graphic suspended or changed hands and "Uncle Nelson" subsequently entered into his final rest.

The notes I preserved, and long after Mr. McFarland's death, or when Mr. Hedenberg and myself were engaged in our Souvenir Edition of The Sentinel, I discovered I had misplaced them. Although every effort was made to locate them at that time, not until the summer of 1922 were they found among a box of old papers. Dates of some incidents have become dim from age and mildew and a few names almost obliterated, but in preparing this article I will only attempt to give the parts plainly legible

and as were actually related to me by Mr. McFarland and at the different times we were engaged in preparing them.

Respectfully, B. F. Bond.

### "We're Off"

A single horse and buggy from the livery barn was prepared for us and with a well filled lunch basket, a spade, a hoe and ax, taken by Mr. McFarland, (Uncle Nelson, as I addressed him), left Versailles bright and early on a beautiful morning in late May, 1901, to spend the day among scenes and surroundings made historical by the first white settlers of what is now Brown county. Uncle Nelson was as a school boy as the spirited horse took up a brisk trot that was to carry us on our day's outing.

As we were descending the Vandeventer hill, Uncle Nelson commenced his narrative. "Right there," he pointed, "stood the first log school house and over yonder by those big trees in the meadow, is where Dr. Isaac Vandeventer built his first cabin and just around that, while we were engaged in a barn raising early in the spring of 1832, Black Hawk, the Indian chief, paid us a visit." But he added, "Let's let all this go. We'll take a trip down that road the next time past the Hambaugh, Stone and Root settlements. I want to start our story at the old cabin."

But still he couldn't refrain from pointing out places of interest, for we had just crossed the bridge over Camp creek when he said, "Right over there is where they buried 'Indian Tom,' yes sir, and they buried everything he owned with him. They even led his pony into the grave they had opened and knocked it in the head and it fell dead upon the

body of old 'Indian Tom' so he could have it for use in the 'Happy Hunting Ground'."

We now soon reached the Vandeventer school house where we unhitched our horse from the buggy and tied him to graze and prepared to spend the day on "the actual spot," as Uncle Nelson termed it, where stood the cabin home of Brown county's first white families.

### Locating the Cabin Spot

"You follow on this flat up south of the grave yard," he said as he commenced the ascent of the hill leading to the Vandeventer cemetery. He stopped at the stone marking the first grave in Brown county. Suddenly he called, "Go on East to that little clump of trees and stop."

He returned to the buggy and came to where I was standing with a spade in his hand. He quickly turned over a few shovelful of earth, and there lay the outlines of the old hearthstone of the Vandeventer-McFarland cabin erected in the spring of 1824. "I knew exactly where it stood," he said as he dropped the spade and found a seat on a grassy ledge and gazed silently across the newly plowed fields to where the blue mist from the old Illinois river arose to mingle with the rays of the morning sun.

### Memories

For full five minutes he sat thus while memories of the misty past, no doubt were crowding his every thought.

"Old scenes bring back old memories, Uncle Nelson. Think only of the happier ones and you'll be happy in telling them," I said.

He was a boy again in an instant. "Proverbs say 'The memory of the just is blessed.' Where will we start?" he replied.

"You came from Ohio. Let's tell of the trip out here and who made up your party, or weren't you born in Kentucky?"

"Yes," he replied, "I was the oldest of our family and was born in Harrison county, Kentucky, April 1, 1818, and I was only 6½ years old when we reached here. But I can remember many things that happened before we left Ohio and I know I can remember everything that has happened since," he stated with a happy laugh.

"Alright let's start from Ohio."

"Cornelius Vandeventer and my father, William McFarland, were brothers-in-law; they married sisters, Elizabeth and Susan Myers. Well, they made plans in the fall of 1823 to come West, bring their families and locate on the lands then opening for settlers in this state. It was agreed that my father and family were to come through overland and bring the stock and stop and spend the winter where Springfield now stands and Cornelius and family were to come by the way of the Ohio river and spend the winter with relatives in Shawneetown and join us in the early spring in our hunt for land. My father died that winter and left my mother with four young children, myself the oldest. So when Cornelius and family joined us the next spring, it was decided best to leave us all there until he and his three oldest boys could come and locate the land, put in a corn crop, build a cabin, and come back and get us. They did this and when they reached Naples or Columbia, it was called then, and stood on the high river bluff just this side of the present town of Naples, the settlers there told them where there was vacant land and directed them to this place.

"They found the six acres right here fronting us had been cleared and the charred logs of

a cabin that had burned right on the spot where our first cabin stood. This improvement had been started the year previous by a man by the name of Shepherd, a squatter, who had either been killed by the Indians or gone off and left it. Well, at any rate they finished clearing this six acres, put in corn and built the cabin. They tended this crop and made as many improvement as they could and came back to where we were near Springfield late in June. By the time Cornelius could make a trip to Edwardsville to file on our land and repair the wagons and make ready to return, it was the fourth of September when all was in readiness for us to leave Springfield to take up our abode in this little cabin in the wilderness with no neighbors, no friends, and prey possibility for the Indians or wild beasts of the forest.

"Cornelius Vandeventer in a one horse wagon and leading a horse behind, led our caravan followed by two ox teams drawing the wagons with our two families and our little earthy effects. He again crossed the river at Naples and the path followed across the river bottom, winding around the bluff to our cabin. It seemed an endless journey. The oxen could at times only move with the wagons in the heavy soggy ground. At times the prairie grass would come way up on our wagons and several times we saw wolves dart across our way.

"As we reached the heavy timber where we were to cross Camp Creek, we could see the Indians. Two Indian boys on a pony passed us in opened-eye wonder, as we approached the others, they hid behind trees and in the underbrush. Several Indian bucks came toward us with their hands extended in welcome. We were all pretty badly excited when we reached

our cabin and many of the children were crying. The women asked Cornelius if the Indians that greeted him were some he had met on the previous trip. He replied that he didn't know, all Indians looked alike to him.

"But the cabin reached, all hands were soon engaged in unpacking the wagons and making ready for our first night in our little homes in the western wilds. Cornelius was surprised and happy to find everything unmolested, the corn crop a promising yield and as he told the women, 'Not an Indian track in the field'. He fully believed all would be well."

"Our cabin was well made, but it had only one door and no windows and I think back now and wonder how we managed that first year. There were nine in Cornelius Vandeventer's family and my mother and her four children made 14 in all crowded into the 14x14 one room cabin, but we made it somehow.

"Well, we were here, and after a good night's sleep we were all up the next morning bright and early, we children out the first thing to see if we could see the Indians and we didn't have long to wait. The women had washed some of our garments and hung them around on the bushes and the first thing we knew several Indian bucks were there inspecting them, and one fellow, we soon found out was the big chief, made known they wanted the buttons on the garments. They were made to understand they couldn't have them and presently they all left for camp. That afternoon here came their squaws, some of them carrying papooses, and by this time other garments were out for drying that had big bright buttons on them and it was hard work to keep the squaws from taking them.

"This Indian camp was down on the river at the old mouth

of Camp Creek where they would stay through the summer and when cold weather came or the river commenced to rise they would move back to the ravines along the bluff. Well, we soon got used to the Indians. While they were awful beggars and a terrible nuisance sometimes, we put up with it because we had to for they were our only neighbors you know.

"Cornelius, the boys and the women worked hard that fall getting things ready for the winter; shelter had to be provided for the stock, the corn gathered and all things made ready for cold weather. I remember hearing the older ones talk about how they dreaded the first winter. While it was a cold one for a time, it wasn't a bad winter and we got through it in good shape. We found plenty to live on, wild honey, more than we could use, all kinds of game and we lived on the fat of the land.

"We had made big plans through the winter what should be done the next spring and summer, and oh, my, how everybody did work. Well, Cornelius and the boys even the women working in the clearing every day they could the first winter, but when spring opened up it was from daylight till dark. We expected other whites would come from the East that year, but none came. Some passed through but went on to Missouri.

### Dies on the Way

"One evening in the month of April, a man and a woman driving a one-horse wagon and leading another horse behind, drove up to our cabin and said they wanted to camp there for the night. The woman was sick and our women folk wanted her to sleep in the cabin, but she claimed she was used to sleeping in the wagon and preferred to do that rather than

trouble our people. In the night the man awoke us and said his wife was very sick. They carried her in the house and she died before daylight. Cornelius and her husband made a rude coffin and they buried her up there on the hill. The man remained for two or three days cutting a marker out of stone to place at her grave, but none ever came afterward to visit her grave. And there she sleeps, forgotten I suppose, but only one of the many who lost in the battle for life and a home in the then western wilderness."

As we sat there, Uncle Nelson, living again those days then 77 years past and gone, I noticed the men were "turning out" of the fields below us for dinner and when his attention was called to the fact, he was as ready as myself to adjourn for lunch.

### Before The Days of Volstead

We returned to our buggy and gave the horse his feed and water and went for our basket of lunch. While Uncle Nelson was busily engaged in preparing a table on the ground, on which to spread our midday repast, I was engaged in inspecting the grub basket prepared for us by the restaurant people, found therein a long necked bottle that I was, at first, at a loss to know as to what it contained. Thinking perhaps that "Uncle" had ordered it, I called to him: "What's in the long bottle Uncle?" "I'm sure I don't know," he replied, adding he never was able to tell what was in a bottle until he had sampled its contents. I lifted the cork, telling him it looked like whiskey and tasting it, notified him it tasted like it; and passing it on to him, he sampled it, and said he believed it was and how he laughed. "The boys have put it in for an appetizer and to brighten our wits, but we'll touch it lightly," and when we

had finished, we had enough of the lunch and also the appetizer left for supper and we voted then and there that we would stay and drive home in the cool of the evening.

### Taken Prisoner by the Indians

"One morning in the summer of 1825, we found our cabin surrounded by 15 or 20 Indian bucks and several more came marching Cornelius and the boys out of the field. They took us all, men, women and children to their camp down at the mouth of Camp Creek. None of us knew what had happened but realized that something out of the ordinary had and the women and we children were almost frightened to death. I guess if the truth was known Cornelius and the older boys were also badly excited.

"When we arrived at their camp, they put Cornelius and Elihu in two canoes and took them across the river and landed on Eagle island. They left them there and came back and took the two other older boys. By this time we were mighty badly excited because my mother and aunt were crying and so were most of the children. But they were not gone long before they brought them all back to this side of the river and our men told there was a dead Indian lying over there under a tree and they wanted to suspect that some of our people had killed him.

"They kept us there all day with nothing to eat; some of the squaws did offer the women folks food but they refused it. Cornelius nor none of the older boys knew what to do. The Indians wouldn't talk, but were careful to keep us all enclosed in the circle they formed, chattering and grunting the live long day. Cornelius noticed and spoke to us about it that the Chief was not there and he seemed at a loss to understand this. But

late that afternoon he returned when the bucks all gathered around him and told him what happened. Then commenced the same procedure that had taken place that morning. Cornelius and the three boys were again taken across the river. They were away about the same length of time, but we could tell before the returning canoes hit the river bank that the mystery had been cleared because Cornelius and the Chief were talking and Cornelius was smiling and waved his hands at us. As soon as they landed he said, "Come, let's go," and when we were out of sight of the Indian camp he told us the story.

"He said when the Chief saw the dead Indian he stepped back and looked up the tree, then he went forward, taking the dead Indian's head between his hands, he twisted his neck and grunted. Then he called to the other Indians and pointed to a dead squirrel in the forks of the tree under which the dead Indian lay, at the same time telling them that he had shot that squirrel, it had become lodged and that he had attempted to climb the tree by a dead grape vine that was still hanging from the branches. This had broken and he said he had fallen and broken his neck. That in short, was 'his verdict,' and that was what had happened. That Chief made a friend of us all right there and he never asked for a favor at our cabin after that day but what he got it.

"This Indian chief was no doubt then, or had been, a prominent man among the Indians. He was a Kickapoo, for he told Cornelius that he was one of the twenty-three Indian chiefs who had signed the treaty at Edwardsville in July, 1819, only five years then before we came, ceding over 12 million acres in Illinois to the government. This treaty was

made at Edwardsville and this tract comprised the finest lands within the state, including all the prairies of the central part of the state, the Kickapoo's favorite hunting grounds, and which they claimed as their property by descent from their ancestors and by reason of interrupted possession of nearly sixty years. That these Indians signed this treaty under protest was evident by the bitterness with which this Chief told in his native way the proceedings that took place and led up to the evacuation. These 23 chiefs and their warriors with their plumes, beads and paint acting for their tribes, reluctantly made their scrawls and marks that forced them to give up their homes and hunting grounds forever to the hated whites, all for the sum of less than one-third cent per acre with the additional promise of lands beyond the Mississippi.

"I remember the chief better than all the other Indians," Uncle Nelson continued, "Not because he was chief—one thing maybe, he saved our lives—but there was something about him that made you like him, and at times fear him. He was the ugliest Indian I ever saw or the ugliest man for that matter. The Indians called him (name obliterated), translated in our language means 'Scare the World' and he was ugly enough to do it. I'll tell you more about him when we come to where Isaac Vandeventer build his cabin.

### Some of The Hardships

"Of course our settlement was all covered with heavy timber, just like the thickets you have seen in the river timber, or some of it was like that. To clear this land seemed like an endless job and when it was done, there were the stumps to contend with and then to try to plow it 'with

a yoke of oxen' and a wooden mole-board plow in a patch of ground that would average from 100 to 200 stumps to the acre and that's not counting deadened trees left standing in the patch. But down there along this bluff, around the edge of this prairie, it wasn't as bad as that.

"Land along these bluffs on the edge of this river bottom prairie was covered with a heavy growth of grass and weeds that in places grew so tall and rank that a man on horse back could hardly see over it and in places covered with flowers of every hue of the rainbow.

"Great fires swept these bottoms almost every fall the Indians told us. No doubt the Indians set those fires to run out the wild game. This would destroy all the vegetation and leave the ground blackened and charred and no doubt, was the cause of these low lands having no more timber on them as these fires would extend into the forests hereabouts, burning the under bush, but for no great distance, for one could hardly penetrate far into the timber when we first came here for the trees and brush were covered with grape vines. Virginia creepers, trumpet vines and wild ivy binding and tying the trees and undergrowth together making it so dark and well nigh impossible to work your way through any distance."

### Wild Fowls and Animals

"These impenetrable forests and patches of underbrush furnished protection to the many wild animals that inhabited this country then. There were plenty of deer lots of wolves, panthers and wildcats, foxes, badgers, coons, opossums, otters, minks, muskrats, skunks and varments such as these by the thousands; and snakes, the country was alive with 'em."

"How about ducks and geese,

Uncle Nelson?"

"Say, they were so thick when you would scare them up down there in some of the marshes that when they raised up to fly, they made so much noise it sounded like a thunder storm; and wild pigeons, oh my! oh my! thousands and thousands of them. Would you believe it that sometimes when they came to their roosting places in the evening, they would alight in such swarms that they would break the limbs of the trees. Yes, that's the honest fact. But pigeons weren't thicker than mosquitoes and all kinds of insects. My! My! I'll tell you Fred, the mosquitoes made life the second summer almost unbearable. Why some nights we wouldn't get a wink of sleep, particularly if the weather was warm and the air was damp. Smoke wouldn't stop 'em then, no sir; and the green flies, oh how they would cover the horses and oxen in the fields. Many's the day I have trudged along with a big willow brush fanning them off as the boys drove the oxen to the old mole board plow. And the first roll of mosquito netting we got, we did make that stretch out and cover a lot of sleeping quarters. No, that was many years before screens were ever dreamed of and a good many years after we came.

### End of the Second Summer Death Comes to the Cabin

"The second year's harvest promised an abundant yield, corn, flax and vegetables, and we could look forward to the coming of the winter without so much dread and apprehension. The summer was drawing to a close and it had been one of utter toil. We had all suffered some sickness more malaria than anything else, until my Aunt Lizzie, Cornelius' wife, took sick. No doctor in miles of course then and only home

remedies. There was real sadness around this cabin then, for my mother and Cornelius realized the chances were all against her, and they couldn't hide their anxiety from us children when my poor mother moaned 'Oh, for neighbors and help now.' But I look back and wonder how they stood up under some of the trials they were called upon to undergo; it required a strong heart, yes indeed. But death came to our cabin on Sept. 5, 1825. My aunt passed away on that date and sadness and grief reigned upon us for days and weeks. They buried her up there just above the cabin, with only the members of our family about her open grave. She was the first to go, but others followed within the next few years. But here in the wilderness, it was a struggle with life and death always, especially in those early years. But the winter was coming and all preparations were made to meet it and we carried our grief and were ready for it when it reached us."

### **Winter Comes and With it Additions to the Colony**

"The greatest event ever celebrated in this first cabin was the arrival of Isaac Vandeventer and his young wife from Virginia. He was a nephew of Cornelius and came from Virginia on the advice of Cornelius, who had written him months before of the opportunity to obtain land here.

"It was after dark in the evening of December 12, 1825, when they drove up to our cabin. The evening was uncommonly warm for that time of the year, and the door of the cabin was open. They saw the light on this account several miles away, or they wouldn't have been able to find us that night, they said. They came through in a one-horse covered wagon and had been over three weeks on the road.

"A new back log was rolled into the fire place that night, and our families and the new comers gathered around the fire that lighted up the whole cabin clear to the roof, for it didn't have any ceiling. Us 'tow-head youngsters' were all allowed to sit up, and you are mighty right if you think we found places as close to the new comers as we could while they told us the latest news from Virginia and their trip across the country to join us. Cornelius and our boys told them of the happenings since our arrival and we ate supper again with them. My mother made Johnny cakes and we had plenty of venison and wild honey and lots of other good food in abundance, and it was way after midnight when we, all three in the same room, retired more happy than we had been for weeks and months, if not since we had come to the cabin."

### **Plan New Cabins**

"The next morning after the arrival of Isaac Vandeventer and his young wife, and by the way, she was a fine woman, well educated for that day, full of fire and ambition and her first thought was the location for their cabin. Of course, it was then pointed out to her that this be placed near a spring and close to wood for you know we passed up all that fine land around Jacksonville for it wasn't good for wood and water. And then everybody from the cabin went with them and they decided on the spot I pointed out coming just under the bluff. There was a spring close and wood in abundance, but the newcomers were made to understand they had a home with us until their cabin could be gotten ready and Isaac would have to make a trip to Edwardsville and enter the land according to law before commencing improvements. A 'squatter' had no rights and



would lose all the improvements he had made should someone enter it according to law, and he would have to move off.

"On the way back from selecting the site for Isaac's cabin, Cornelius and he intended to build another cabin, a larger one, in the spring as we were crowded and he selected a spot at the spring north of the road and west of the school house about 500 yards. We had carried water from the spring ever since we arrived.

"Some mighty bad weather followed the coming of Isaac and his wife, but by February the snow was off and all hands were busy. Our men folks helped Isaac when they could and he put up what we called a 'lean-to', sort of a shed facing the south with all the south part open. He built this to have a place to work and take his time in putting up his cabin, and on the 13th of March that year, he and his wife moved in. We had some pretty chilly weather following, but they 'toughed' it out and they got into their new cabin the next fall. And by that time Cornelius had his new cabin about ready to move into, working at times when they could leave the crops.

"We could hear of more settlers coming into the new country, but none coming into our neighborhood. There were several cabins at Meredosia, or south of where Meredosia now stands, just south of the present railroad depot. Some of these were French traders."

### New Town On River

"Columbia had been changed to Naples and there a new town laid out on August 8th of that year (1825), and we all prophesied that it couldn't help but make a city. I guess if our folks had the money they would have invested in town lots."

"During that fall a party of French traders paid our Indian

camp a visit for the purpose of buying their furs. They always brought plenty of whiskey when they made such visits for it's a pretty easy matter to trade with an Indian when he's filled up on 'fire water.' One of the squaws from the camp was at our cabin for salt just before dark and told us that the traders had left whiskey and the Indians were drunk. We could hear them whooping and yelling occasionally. We were always a little more on the alert after hearing the Frenchmen had visited with the Indians. We could hear them long before we went to bed and for hours afterward, and about two o'clock in the morning we could hear the squaws coming jabbering and moaning. The folks let them into the cabin. Some of them had their bodies beaten black and blue; they had been trying to keep the drunken Indians from killing each other. They wanted our men to go to the camp, but they refused.

"Several of them remained the rest of the night in the cabin and Cornelius and some of the boys went back with them early the next morning. I suppose it looked to them like a cyclone had passed over that camp. Several were badly beaten up but only one was dead. The Indian that committed the murder had jumped into a canoe and started down the river in the middle of the channel. Two of the dead Indian's relatives had given chase, following him on foot down the bank of the river. The Indian in the canoe went on to St. Louis where he purchased a plug hat and other citizen clothes that might disguise him. But when the two Indians on his trail reached St. Louis several days afterward they recognized him and killed him, and a few days later returned to the camp with a duty well performed."

### Entertains "Scare the World"

"During that same fall after Isaac Vandeventer had finished his cabin, he and his wife were engaged in making pumpkin butter in a kettle over a fire out in their yard. They had a high rail fence built around the cabin and in the midst of their labor, they noticed Chief Scare the World perched on the top-most rail taking in the proceedings. He soon came to the conclusion that whatever it was they were cooking was good to eat, so he slid down the fence and made his wants known. Afraid to refuse, Isaac's wife went to the cabin and came back with a bowl and spoon which she filled and handed to him. It was in the boiling stage but he managed to make away with it and passed the bowl back for a refilling. This was repeated time and time again, the only change in the proceedings were that he was taking a little more time each helping to store it away, but he was a 'stayer' and it was almost sundown when he handed the bowl back with a grunt that signified that he had had enough. He made several attempts to climb the fence enclosing the cabin before he reached the top. He sat there a second or two and tumbled in a heap on the other side and there he laid. The folks didn't have any remedy for 'too much pumpkin butter' so they didn't bother him, and he laid right there until after sun-up the next morning when he roused up stretched himself and struck out for the camp, no doubt thinking he had been having a 'heap big time'."

### Hamilton Neighswonger Arrives—First Settler on Site of Versailles

"In the early spring of 1826, Hamilton Neighswonger, a brother-in-law of Cornelius Vandeventer, arrived with his family.

They came from Hamilton county and had been living in this state four or five years up to this time. He was the son of a pioneer and had inherited a love for adventure and romance of pioneer life and was skilled in everything pertaining to life in the wilderness; 'a crack shot' with a rifle and a reputation for 'tracking Injuns'. He was almost a giant in stature, straight as an Indian and as nimble as a deer. He dressed exactly like the Indians; buckskin pants, moccasins and buckskin hunting shirt and in cold weather wore a coon skin cap and blanket. He also wore his hair long and altogether was the finest looking specimen of mankind to be seen among the early pioneers.

"Well, of course, the neighbors pointed out to the Neighswongers a place to build their cabin. While this 'old woodsman' didn't say much they couldn't tell him anything. He took his time in selecting a place to enter his land and build his cabin. He discovered the famous spring that bears his name and erected his cabin close by. This was the first settlement made on the present site of the town of Versailles. We now had four cabins in our settlement. Although the Neighswongers were nearly four miles from us, they were considered close neighbors in those days.

"Hamilton Neighswonger hadn't more than finished his cabin until he was hunting with the Indians. They took right up with him and he would join in their hunts and be gone for days and after returning home, he would roll up in his blanket in front of his fireplace with his head to the fire Indian fashion and he would lay there until he had fully rested from his trip. His family said that he seldom slept in a bed until the later years of his life. He died in the year of 1855.

"Your grandfather, Henry

Casteen, A. D. Ravencroft, Corneilus and Dr. Isaac Vandeventer bought 22 acres of the Neighswonger land and founded the town. This tract was then (1836) all in heavy timber, mostly sugar maple and black walnut, and I helped to clear and haul the logs from most of it. They were then at that time making the roadbed for the old Northern Cross railroad that passes through town and to this day is plainly traceable, but only a memory of a busted enterprise that promised too much to us then.

"The town site was surveyed and platted by Allen Persinger, a young settler who lived up on Crooked Creek in December, 1836. The state road running from Meredosia to Quincy and established in 1929, he made it 'Main Street,' with the center of the block on the east 'the public square.' But for some reason the square was afterwards platted into lots and sold. One of the Briggs' and a young man by the name of Williamson, grandfather of Mrs. Andrew Boss, carried the stakes and chains, and they and the men all went to your grandfather's cabin for dinner and there your grandmother, Mrs. Casteen, gave it the name of Versailles after her old Kentucky Home.' That was December 2 of that year (1836).

"Poor woman, they said, she always longed for her old home and at times grew very homesick. I have heard them tell that some neighbor women, who once called to pay a friendly visit, found her in the sugar grove west of the cabin kneeling under a tree. Thinking her ill, they started to lift her to her feet when she said to them, 'I always come here to pray.' But hers were not the only prayers that went up from these solitudes back in those old days.

### Versailles First Wedding

"On the 26th of October, 1826, Cornelius Vandeventer and my mother, Mrs. Susan McFarland, were united in marriage. My mother, you will remember, was a sister to his first wife. This was the first wedding to be celebrated in Versailles township.

"The winter of 1826 was not cold, but squally, high winds and disagreeable cold rains. Isaac Vandeventer's new cabin was nice and comfortable unless the wind should come from a certain direction. He had failed to build the stick chimney high enough and there would be days when the wind was coming from this direction that he and his wife could not stay in their cabin on account of smoke. She complained that she didn't know which was the worse, smoke in the winter or mosquitoes in the summer.

### Hambaugh and Lambkins, The First Hikers

"In the month of February, 1827, the population of our settlement made another increase when Pious Hambaugh and George Lambkin walked over here from Edwardsville, a trip that took them three days to make for the ground was covered with snow and all the trails on this side of the river obliterated. But they finally found our cabin and our men directed them where to locate, and assisted Lambkin to put up his barn and cabin. He selected an 80 acres that is now a part of the Bent Martin farm, and his cabin stood on the same spot where the brick dwelling now stands. It took two weeks to put up these buildings, and in the meantime Pious Hambaugh had selected his 80 acres where the old Hambaugh home still stands. They went back after Lambkin's family and stock and returned in March.

"This was a part of Schuyler county at that time and settlers were slowly drifting in here and there, and during that summer six election precincts were established in the county. Isaac Vandeventer was appointed as one of the judges, and it was that summer that Isaac commenced the study of medicine with Dr. Ross down at Atlas, then the county seat of Pike county.

"You know we didn't have a doctor in miles and you couldn't have found one if you had spent a week in the search.

"Dr. Isaac graduated at Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1830, and was the first doctor in the county and his practice took him as far as Jacksonville and Quincy.

### **First White Child Born In Brown County**

"It was on the 26th of June in the year 1827 that my half-sister, Lizzie was born, the first white child born in Brown county. She is now Mrs. Elizabeth Burgesser, widow of the late George W. Burgesser. You should have seen the Indian squaws flock to the cabin when they heard of it. They crowded and chattered and called her 'White Popoose' and one squaw wanted to trade her copper colored papoose for the white one. There was something sacred to an Indian squaw about a white baby.

### **The First Steamboat**

"The first steamboat to navigate the Illinois river was 'The North Star.' This was in the spring of 1828.

"The Indians knew several hours before its arrival that it was coming and how they knew I can't say unless an Indian runner brought word up from down the river. That would have been an easy matter, for, of course the first boats had to stop along

the river occasionally to replenish their fuel supply as they all burned wood. Of course later 'wood yards' sprung up all along the river banks to supply them.

"But let's get back to the story. Somehow or other the Indians had a dread of the approaching steamers as their actions denoted when they came to the cabin wanting our men to come to the camp to be present when it arrived. They apparently thought it possessed supernatural powers to navigate on the water without paddles or oars. Cornelius was not surprised to hear that a boat was 'headed this way.' He expected it before this time, and, of course, we knew the Indians were telling the truth, so every 'chick and child' of us headed for the Indian camp to see the first steamboat.

"We were there, I know, over an hour watching down the river without so much as 'batting an eye—we younger ones at any rate—when all of a sudden it came around the point and we hadn't so much as seen a smudge (smoke). It crept slowly toward us and to me it apparently grew bigger and bigger. I'll never forget, I thought it was a monster. The children from our cabins chattered, the men talked, but nary an Indian so much as grunted. I remember looking at them; their faces don't have any expression you know at any time, and this was no exception. Well, the boat passed and the waves that followed washed an Indian canoe from the bank and a big buck jumped into the water and dragged it back and said to Cornelius 'ugh, big boat, have lots of little boats,' and then several young bucks commenced to take up the river bank with their eyes glued to the steamer and occasionally falling over the underbrush, so fearful to take their eyes from it as it slowly plowed its way, feeling for the uncharted chan-

nel. This was the first boat to unload a cargo at Beard's Ferry, now Beardstown.

"I don't think that boats came up the river regularly that season, Well, at first they didn't have any schedule; they just came along when they got here and back the same way. But it wasn't so many years after this there were several different boats on the river, and after Versailles started, there were two warehouses built on the river, Ravenscroft's and Jephtha Wilson's.

### First Post Office

"Two more families joined our settlement, Sam Root and John Stone and they crossed the river at Meredosia, a ferry boat was in operation there now—but no town, (the spring of 1828). In the fall of the same year Jefferson Hume and Elisha Adams got here, and that same fall Cornelius was appointed postmaster and he kept the office at his cabin and it was called 'Vandeventer.' A man by the name of Fowler carried the mail and I think it was sent up from Alton to Exeter, thence to Naples and then over here, that is, it was while Cornelius was postmaster. They didn't bring it very often either and you paid 25c to get a letter out of the office; they didn't send them already paid. I remember a man came down from Elisha Adams' that winter and asked Cornelius if there was a letter for him and he told him, yes. He asked Cornelius to read it so he read it to the man. This fellow told Cornelius he would come back and get it as soon as he could get the 25c. I think that broke Cornelius of reading letters before they paid the postage because that fellow never did come back."

### A Barn Raising

"The two years from 1828 to

1830 saw several more families added to our settlement. Stephen Hambaugh, a brother of Pious, had come with his father and mother and moved into the cabin with his brother. People now had commenced to mingle more together. They had a barn raising at Hambaugh's and I'll never forget that day. All the settlers gathered there and there was genuine brotherly love and kindness shown everybody, and such a merry time at that dinner—and such a dinner—everything provided came from Hambaugh's. They had vension, turkey, potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, milk, cornbread and wild gooseberry pie—that much I can remember now.

"After dinner the men filled their pipes and some of the women smoked and it was home made twist right out of their own garden. The men talked of the needs of the settlement and the women talked about their housekeeping and swapped recipes and home remedies for the 'ager' and other ills. And these gatherings sometimes ended up with a religious discussion and the interpretations of the Scriptures, but all in the best of humor."

### Forward

The notes for this narrative were originally written to cover the period dating from Sept. 7, 1824, the date of the arrival of the Vandeventer and McFarland families to Dec. 31, 1839, the date of the marriage of the narrator, Robert Nelson McFarland. But upon finding the last portion of the manuscript so badly damaged as to render most of it illegible, thus making it impossible to further arrange a continued and connecting story. I am forced, for this reason, to write "Finis" with the present installment.

I can only regret that I am by this prevented in mentioning names of many of the pioneers.

who, the narrator states, were active in the early development of the township, among whom are the Briggs', Jethro, Dan, Hank and Colonel Vandeventer, James Bullard, the Summys, Townsends, Humes, Spencer Hall, John Surratt, David McLaughlin, Sr., John Sides, Dan James Brown and many others.

I have, however, copied and shall preserve the scraps of many interesting incidents and events that I have been able to salvage from the damaged pages and these, with much other material which I possess, may aid others who might care to add to the story of our pioneers.

The oldest township in the county is rich in tradition with a wealth of sentiment, and all contributions of this character will, I am certain, find welcome and open columns in *The Sentinel*; and may assist in leading to the erection of permanent Markers at some of the historical spots featured in the township's history before "Old Father Time" has removed souls that has knowledge of their locations or over whose material sepulchers Nature shall have drawn the Mantle of Oblivion.

Respectfully,  
B. F. Bond.

### **Parts of the Following Incident Lost**

A story of "Bald Knob, a high point along the bluff east of the cabin, upon the summit of which the Indians sent up their "smoke signals." Also the full story of an Indian wedding that took place one night at the Indian camp, to which the men of the settlement were invited and for fear of offense, Isaac and Cornelius Vandeventer and the latter's sons, William and Peter, attended. They were most cordially received and placed in the hands of an Indian artist who painted their faces for the occasion and then they were

given seats of honor on a log to witness the ceremony. It is needless to add that they were hardly recognizable by their folks at the cabin on their return and they spent the balance of the night in removing their "Indian make-up."

Uncle Nelson always alluded to the Indians in a friendly spirit, stating that the Indians "were good to the settlers" and the eight years he spent with them here were filled with adventures he enjoyed. He played as a boy with the young Indians and they could always outdo their white playmates in running and jumping and all boyish sports.

And again, the wedding of Stephen Hambaugh and Elmina Stone, which occurred on December 23, 1830, the evening the "deer snow" commenced falling. All the settlers gathered at the Stone cabin for the event and Hamilton Neighswonger brought his fiddle along and they danced all night, but by daylight the snow had reached such a depth that many of the guests were "marooned" at the cabin and were forced to remain for several days.

One of the incidents of this wedding was when the guests were all taken suddenly ill with the exception of Hamilton Neighswonger, by eating something served at the wedding feast and that he "fiddled away" until they had recovered sufficiently to go on with the dance.

### **An Indian Feast**

"Things moved along pretty much as in previous years only everything continued to look more promising. The ground cultivated in previous years became more productive as the wild nature was being worked out of the soil. Our bunch of stock was all doing well and increasing. We had a good many head of hogs, several more

thrifty calves, and lots of chickens considering the trouble we had to save them from the varmints (this was the fall of 1830).

"But speaking of hogs, we used to in those days turn them out to run wild, and by late fall when it came time to 'round them up', they were most of them usually as wild as deers, and on Sundays before that time we would go out through the timber and down along the river and try to have them located.

"It was on one of these trips down in the river timber one Sunday, when I was a good sized boy, with Cornelius Vandeventer that I am about to tell you about. We had spent the morning tracking several hogs and finally found them way down on the Big Sand Ridge. Cornelius got close enough to see that they were fat and he said we could shoot them when we got ready for them.

"On returning we came back up the river bank and by the Indian camp. Well, when we reached it, Cornelius stopped and they insisted we stay and eat. I had never seen them preparing a 'feast' before and that's what they were doing. Cornelius decided to stay, and while they were talking with him I noticed them heating rocks. They had several rocks piled on a log-heap fire and every once in a while they would get one of these out of the fire and with some kind of a two-pronged hook they would drop these hot rocks into a big kettle of something that smelled and looked like soup. My boyish curiosity aroused I idled over by the kettle to see what they were cooking. The contents of the kettle were boiling, and while standing there I saw boil up to the surface the hind leg of a coon, foot, hair and all, and I decided right there that I wasn't hungry enough to tackle that 'Indian soup'."

### **Meredosia—How it was Named for a Pretty Girl**

Down by the "Old Illinios"  
broad expanse,  
Where the steamer rocks and  
raves,  
City lots are staked for sale,  
Above Old Indian graves.

"In the fall of 1831, they staked out a new town on the river, Meredosia.

"Two brothers by the name of Waldo had opened a store with a full stock of goods shipped up by boat from New Orleans. We didn't have much money in the settlement then, but we did have a pretty good supply of beeswax and coonskins and they were both legal tender. We needed lots of things in our cabin yet at that time, and we were mighty glad to see a store as close as Meredosia.

"I don't know how true it is, but they used to tell how Meredosia got its name. There was a French trader lived there, so the story goes, by the name of Dosia and he had a daughter by the name of 'Mere'; I suppose that's French for Mary, I don't know as to that. Well, anyway Mere was a pretty girl and all the young fellows were in love with her, in fact, everybody liked her and when they commenced to try to decide on a name, Mere's many admirers all asked that the new town be christened Mere Dosia, but they compromised by making it one word, Meredosia, in place of dividing it. I am sure that's how Meredosia got its name."

### **Black Hawk Visits Versailles Indians Depart for War**

"In the month of February, 1832, while all the men of the settlement had gathered at the cabin of John Stone, one of the settlers, along the bluff just below Isaac Vandeventer's cabin for a barn raising, several In-

dians from the camp on the river came up to watch the men at work. They were accompanied that day by a distinguished visitor, none other than the famous Indian Chief, Black Hawk. They told the men at work who their visitor was, but Black Hawk didnt make a speech, or in fact, talk to any of the whites that day that I ever heard of. He was here for a different purpose we found out afterwards, for in just 'so many moons' after his visit you couldn't have found an Indian in the county. They had all vanished. No one saw them go or knew where they went, but we understood it all when a rider rode into the settlement and left word at all the cabins for every man and boy who could carry a gun to shoulder his arms and come to Beards-town to go fight the Indians under Black Hawk. Cornelius Vandeventer and Stephen Hambaugh went from our settlement.

"Of course, we all know what happened, but that was the last of the Indians in our settlement. There had been a good size camp of them along up to this time on the river near the mouth of Crooked creek (Indian Ford). A lot of these Indians came back following this uprising and one of these Indians told a white man by the name of Naught, who was a friend of the Indian, that they were planning a massacre against the whites, adding, 'Red men kill whites and when we kill, we kill good.' Naught spread the alarm, and the settlers swooped down on the camp and killed all of their dogs, the worst insult you could show an Indian and then drove them out of the country, following for miles. That episode marked the last for 'Mr Indian' along the Illinois river.

"Of course we don't know how much they hated to leave here. It was their home, and

love of home is a human passion and it may have been so with them. Upon these old bluffs all along the river are the graves of their dead. They buried them here that the spirits might look down on the prairies below, or watch the passing canoes along the river."

### Homeward Bound

As we rode home that night, Uncle Nelson pointed out to me the site of the Vandeventer saw mill on Camp Creek erected in 1833. "They used a ship saw," he said, "and it was operated by water power. Much of the work was done at night by aid of fire light. None of the men possessed a time piece and they kept track of the hours by the aid of a tallow candle. Elihu Vandeventer had a notched stick and he could tell within 15 minutes of the correct time by placing this stick along the side of this burning candle.

"The material for Squire Vandeventer's early mansion built in 1863 was turned out by this mill, as was much of the lumber for the early homes built in Versailles, among them the old Ravenscroft dwelling north of the M. E. church."

He talked of early roads and when George Finch's stage line ran between Meredosia and Quincy, and how Hamilton Neighswonger stopped hunting with the Indians long enough to show the settlers, who were engaged in helping a newcomer with his cabin, something they didn't know. He told them to always put two doors in the cabin exactly opposite and they could drag up a big log to one door and by passing a rope or chain through from the opposite door and hitching on the oxen, the log could be pulled into the house and easily rolled into the fireplace, a plan adopted in building all the cabins after that.



He told me how after the second cabin was finished that the first one was then used as a sort of "boy house"—sleeping quarters for all the boys in both families.

Peter Vandeventer, a brother of Cornelius, had arrived in the fall of 1832. The late Dr. Saul Vandeventer was a son of Peter and was almost 15 years of age at that time. Peter died three weeks after their arrival and as the mother had died previous to the family's coming, Saul, it was decided, was to make his home with his Uncle Cornelius and he thus became a member of "the family of boys in the cabin."

One night that winter, the boys were all gathered in front of the fireplace cracking nuts and popping corn, and were in a good-natured argument as to whose night it was to go after water to the spring a quarter of a mile away, when suddenly a panther screamed just outside of the cabin door, "Well," he laughed, "I thought then we would go to bed thirsty that night, but pretty soon the argument was resumed. You know how thirsty a fellow gets eating parched corn, well, they started the argument again because we had to have water and they finally decided Saul and I hadn't carried any water for a week. So Saul took the rifle down and I got the bucket—we just had it to do. There was a fresh skiff of snow on the ground and a pale moon and by these we could see the animal's tracks, and he was headed for the spring too. I tell you we were feeling 'pretty creepy,' but we kept going and before we reached the spring, the tracks took over the hill to the north. We got the water, and decided before we went to bed to start at daylight on its track. We did but a man living north of where the DeWitt school house now stands had just kill-

ed it before we reached there. It had killed some of his young stock and he shot it while it was standing at its kill."

Reminded of hunting, he told of how he had captured a young fawn and how it had become domesticated. He had strapped a small bell about its neck after it had taken to leaving for several days at a time and when it would return, it would usually bring a wild deer back with it. He would kill this and in a few days the same thing would be repeated until the tame deer lost its bell, then he supposed some hunter killed it. After that if he wanted venison he had to go hunt for it but in those days he could always get it.

Among other things, he told of the siege the settlers went through the winter of the deep snow, 1830-31. Most of the settlers were not prepared for so desperate a storm and they necessarily suffered untold hardships. The storm, he said later, lasted for three weeks and he didn't suppose that the thermometer raised above 10 or 12 below zero during all that time.

And then came the cholera epidemic in 1833. He did not know how many died in this section of the country, but seven or eight in their immediate settlement died from May 31 to June 20. Cornelius Vandeventer lost three children, the two oldest boys, William whose age was 26 and Peter, 24 and Eliza, a daughter, 13. In several instances a strong healthy man would die in the same day he would get sick. A kettle of boiling water was kept at each cabin. A continuous bath in very hot water was the best remedy known. Dr. Isaac Vandeventer never slept during this time and saved many of the settlers' lives, and again when the epidemic reappeared in 1844 and again in 1849 he was even more successful. But during the last siege of this terrible plague in

1851, the good doctor appeared to have a premonition that he left as though he would be permitted to take his patients through but probably loose his own life. And such proved to be the fact. He came home late in the evening from visiting a patient when he was suddenly stricken with the disease and was a corpse before morning, his death occurring in Aug. 1851, at the age of 52 years. His residence and office stood on the corner where Reid's store now stands. Dr. Saul Vandeventer, who was then practicing at Cooperstown, came to Versailles and succeeded Dr. Isaac and he too, went through numerous hardships.

"You of your age can only have a meager conception of the hardships endured, the struggles and trials and anxieties experienced back in those days by the early settlers. There were no roads, just a sort of a path or winding trail here and there to avoid a hill or marsh or find a place to ford a stream. In farming wheat was sown broadcast and cut with a reap hook or cradle, threshed over the top of a barrel or tramped out on the barn floor by horses or cattle, corn was planted by hand, plowed with a one-horse plow or tended with a hoe, and most of these first settlers hadn't reached middle-age when they came here. Cornelius Vandeventer was 42 when he arrived, his first wife was then 37, my mother, her sister and Cornelius' second wife, was 34, Isaac Vandeventer was 26, and Jane, his wife, was only 20. Hamilton Neighswonger was in his early forties and that is about the way it averaged.

"Back in those days when clothing was all "homespun" and about everything home-made, there was not many "society events." Though the "husking bee," old fashioned spelling school and the occas-

ional religious gatherings in some settler's cabin served to draw the people together. And the first sermon your grandfather, Rev. Granville Bond, the old Methodist minister ever preached, was delivered in the door yard at Dr. Isaac Vandeventer's under the bluffs in the early thirties. All these gatherings afforded the settlers enjoyment and then for further amusement, the young folks could ride horseback, take long strolls together and during the winter slide down the hills, crack nuts and pop corn by the fire in the big, old fireplaces, which all brought as much happiness to the youngsters in those old days as are enjoyed by the younger generation of this age." He spoke of the early struggles of his own early married life and its sunshine and sorrows—the parting of loved ones.

He had lived it all over again that day and before we reached our homes, we had made plans for a tour down the road to the Hambaugh settlement. But unknown to us then, we were returning from the last trip we would ever take together. Mr. McFarland, however, lived five years after this, but during his last years he was always poorly, and on July 16 1906, passed to the Great Beyond, where, we trust all of those who were here with him in these early pioneer cabins back in the days so long ago, stood ready to greet him as the Shores of Eternity received his soul.

The End.











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A HISTORY OF THE FIRST WHITE SETTLERS IN



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